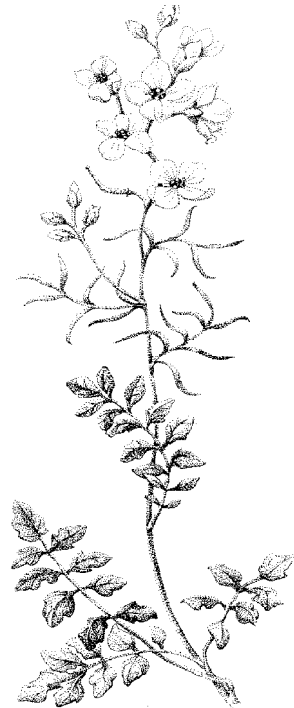


## Action Plan Scope:

This action plan covers the UK BAP priority habitat Lowland meadows and pasture<sup>1</sup>, which encompasses all major forms of unimproved neutral grassland below the ffridd wall (or below 300m altitude), whether hay meadow or managed as pasture. The plan also includes semi-improved grasslands of conservation interest. The habitat is mainly found on farmland, but relict and often species-rich examples can occur on roadside verges, embankments, within churchyards and in other settings, from the coastal zone to the upland fringes.

Unimproved neutral grassland is typically species-rich with a high cover of broadleaved herbs. It can occur in pure stands but is often associated with other grassland types, as well as with other habitats, such as scrub and bracken. This plan does not cover maritime grassland communities confined to coastal habitats (see Maritime cliff and slopes Action Plan) or purple moor grass and rush pastures (see Rhos pasture Action Plan).



## 1. CURRENT STATUS

### 1.1 Legislation and priority status

International	Habitats Directive <sup>a</sup> Birds Directive <sup>b</sup>
UK and Wales	SSSI legislation <sup>c</sup> UK BAP priority habitat (unimproved) CROW Act 2000 <sup>d</sup>
Gwynedd	Snowdonia BAP

### 1.2 Status in Wales and beyond

In the UK, the extent and condition of unimproved neutral grassland underwent a dramatic decline during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, almost entirely due to changing agricultural practice<sup>2</sup>. It has been estimated that by 1984 in lowland England and Wales, semi-natural grassland had declined by 97% over the previous 50 years to approximately 200,000 ha, and losses continued during the 1980s and 1990s<sup>2</sup>. There is an estimated 18,500 ha of agriculturally unimproved neutral grassland surviving today in the UK, and the total cover recorded in Wales during recent Phase II survey is 1700 ha<sup>3</sup>. Wales is particularly important for the conservation of *Cynosurus cristatus* - *Centaurea nigra* grassland (MG5) in an oceanic part of its British distribution<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>a</sup> Lowland meadows and pastures are included within some SACs under the "Habitats Directive" - Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora, although the habitat category "lowland hay meadows" listed on Annex I only refers to the MG4 floodplain meadow community which is rare in Wales and absent from Gwynedd (Priority habitats of Wales).

<sup>b</sup> Specific areas of lowland meadows and pasture may be designated as SPA under the "Birds Directive" - Council Directive 79/409/EEC of 2 April 1979 on the conservation of wild birds.

<sup>c</sup> Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000

<sup>d</sup> Under Section 74 of the CROW Act 2000, the Welsh Assembly Government have produced a "List of Species and Habitats of Principal Importance for the Conservation of Biological Diversity". Crown Copyright 2003.

## 1.3 Status in Gwynedd<sup>e</sup>

Only 30 ha of unimproved neutral grassland were recorded in Gwynedd during CCW's Phase II Lowland Grassland Survey (1987 – ongoing)<sup>3</sup>. Although this is a relatively minor proportion of the total Welsh resource, it is recognised that effective conservation and rehabilitation of this widely scattered habitat, which is usually present in fragments of less than 1 ha in size, will require concerted effort across all LBAP areas<sup>3</sup>.

## 2. FACTORS AFFECTING THIS HABITAT IN GWYNEDD

- § Agricultural intensification through drainage, cultivation, reseeding, application of fertilisers and / or slurry, and the shift from hay-making to silage production, has destroyed most of the lowland meadows and pastures throughout Britain.
- § Supplementary stock feeding, associated with increased stocking levels, which can lead to eutrophication as well as localised poaching.
- § Heavy grazing pressure and changes in stock species and breed leading to floristic impoverishment.
- § Management neglect and undergrazing, leading to the development of a rank sward and encroachment by scrub and bracken.
- § Use of herbicides and other pesticides.
- § Development activities such as mineral and rock extraction, road building, housing and landfill.
- § Atmospheric pollution and climate change are probably driving vegetation change though their influence at present is not perfectly understood.

## 3. ASSOCIATED GWYNEDD SAPS / HAPS

Cloddiau, Hedgerows, Transport corridors, Maritime cliff and slopes, Rhos pasture.

Bats, Brown hare, Lapwing, Farmland birds, Bumblebees, Hornet robberfly, Waxcaps.

## 4. CURRENT ACTION IN GWYNEDD

### 4.1 Site and habitat protection

- § The most significant areas of Lowland meadows and pasture are included within SSSI's (Caeau Tyddyn Dicwm, Caeau Tan y Bwlch, Llystyn Isaf), and also within areas identified as potential Wildlife Sites.
- § Areas of Lowland meadows and pasture normally fall within the scope of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Regulations for use of Uncultivated Land and Semi-Natural Areas for intensive agricultural purposes.

### 4.2 Management and programmes of action

- § Agri-environment schemes such as the LIŷn ESA, Tir Cymen, and now Tir Gofal, have played a role in providing incentives to maintain and manage areas of lowland meadows and pasture.
- § The NT have several meadows on the LIŷn which are currently being enhanced and monitored.

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<sup>e</sup> Within this document the term "Gwynedd" refers to areas outside the Snowdonia National Park area, except where specified otherwise

## 4.3 Survey, research and monitoring

- § CCW Phase II Lowland Habitat Survey of Wales began in 1987 and was completed in 2004.
- § A study carried out in 1999 to identify potential Wildlife Sites in Gwynedd identified a number of areas of this habitat.
- § The NT is currently digitising all of its biological survey data that will enable an assessment of the extent and quality of lowland meadows, present on NT, land to be carried out.

## 5. ACTION PLAN OBJECTIVES<sup>f</sup>

1. To maintain and protect the existing extent of lowland meadows and pasture habitat and secure its appropriate long-term management.
2. To restore areas of lowland meadows and pasture in suitable areas, in order to increase the total area of lowland meadows and pasture by about 10%.

## 6. PROPOSED ACTIONS

Code	Action	Partner(s) <sup>9</sup>
<b>Policy and legislation</b>		
1	Consider developing a joint working group with SNPA to ensure effective implementation of Snowdonia and Gwynedd grassland action plans. TARGET/TIMESCALE: By 2007	GC, SNPA, Relevant partners
2	Through the planning process, ensure developments in sensitive locations are compatible with conservation of lowland meadows and pasture. TARGET/TIMESCALE: Ongoing	GC, Relevant partners
3	Ensure that all examples of lowland meadows and pasture that meet the relevant criteria are designated as Wildlife Sites. TARGET/TIMESCALE: Start process of designation by 2007	GC, CCW, NWWT
4	Ensure that the EIA Regulations for Uncultivated Land and Semi-Natural Areas are implemented for relevant agricultural projects affecting qualifying examples of UKBAP lowland meadows and pasture. TARGET/TIMESCALE: Ongoing	WAG, Relevant partners
<b>Species / habitat management and protection</b>		
5	Promote and support grant schemes including Tir Gofal, Llŷn ESA and / or management agreements to secure favourable management and / or restoration of lowland meadows and pasture, taking into account the needs of associated LBAP species and habitats. TARGET/TIMESCALE: Favourable management of 50%, Restoration of 3 ha, by 2015	CCW, CLA, WAG, FUW, FWAG Cymru, GC, NFU Cymru
6	Implement the NGIP to bring about appropriate management and / or restoration and creation of lowland meadows and pasture TARGET/TIMESCALE: By 2008	GC, Relevant partners.
7	Ensure that conservation and enhancement of lowland meadows and pasture and associated LBAP species and habitats is considered within any relevant management plans or grant schemes (including NWMPs, WGS, Tir Gofal, ESA) by liaison (including consultation and provision of comments) between key organisations. TARGET/TIMESCALE: Ongoing	CCW, WAG, FC, GC, NT, NWWT, RSPB

<sup>f</sup> With efforts to be focused on consolidating existing sites and linking fragmented stands. Relatively diverse stands of semi-improved grassland (mainly NVC community MG6b) may be among the most suitable precursors for reversion.

<sup>9</sup> Lead partner for this action is indicated by bold typeface, see section 7.2 for explanation of abbreviations

Advisory		
8	Provide integrated advice to landowners and managers on appropriate management of lowland meadows and pasture. TARGET/TIMESCALE: Ongoing	CCW, CLA, WAG, FUW, GC, NFU Cymru, NT, NWWT
9	Produce and disseminate guidelines for appropriate methods for establishment of new stands of lowland meadows and pasture of wildlife value. TARGET/TIMESCALE: By 2008	CCW, CG, NWWT, NT
Survey, research and monitoring		
10	Identify extent and quality of all lowland meadows and pasture sites through a programme inventory of available data (Phase I, CCW Lowland Grassland Survey, Wildlife Site and other surveys) and survey work, and identify key areas for establishing appropriate management or for restoration (former sites adjacent to, or close to, existing sites that are suitable for reversion). TARGET/TIMESCALE: By 2010	CCW, GC, NWWT, RSPB, NT
11	Encourage surveys of other groups of species found on lowland meadows and pasture and also into the management of key species TARGET/TIMESCALE: Ongoing	CCCW, BC, BTO, CEH, NWWT, UWB
12	Assist with research into and development of techniques for management and re-establishment of lowland meadows and pasture where appropriate and feasible. TARGET/TIMESCALE: Ongoing	CCW, CEH, NWWT, UWB
Communications and publicity		
13	Raise awareness of lowland meadows and pasture and its conservation among landowners and managers by publishing articles in relevant publications and giving talks to relevant groups (e.g. publications and local meetings of NFU, FUW, CLA) TARGET/TIMESCALE: Ongoing	CCW, GC, NT, NWWT, RSPB
14	Raise public awareness of lowland meadows and pasture and associated species through media articles, open days, farm walks, interpretation and events TARGET/TIMESCALE: Ongoing	GC, CCW, NT, NWWT, RSPB

## 7. PARTNERS & OPPORTUNITIES

### 7.1 Overall lead partner for HAP

Countryside Council for Wales (CCW)

### 7.2 Key partners

Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH)

Butterfly Conservation (BC)

British Trust for Ornithology (BTO)

Country Land and Business Association (CLA)

Welsh Assembly Government (WAG)

Environment Agency Wales (EAW)

Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group Cymru (FWAG Cymru)

Farmers Union of Wales (FUW)

Forestry Commission (FC)

Gwynedd Council (GC)

National Farmers Union Cymru (NFU Cymru)

National Trust (NT)

North Wales Wildlife Trust (NWWT)

RSPB Cymru

Snowdonia National Park Authority (SNPA)

## 7.3 Opportunities

Farming unions, landowners and managers

## 8. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Line drawings: English Nature

## 9. ABBREVIATIONS

BAP: Biodiversity Action Plan, SSSI: Site of Special Scientific Interest, CROW: Countryside and Right of Way Act, ESA: Environmentally Sensitive Area, HAP: Habitat Action Plan, JNCC: Joint Nature Conservation Committee, LBAP: Local Biodiversity Action Plan, NWMP: Native Woodland Management Plan, SAP: Species Action Plan, SAC: Special Area of Conservation, SPA: Special Protection Area, NGIP: Natur Gwynedd Implementation Project, EIA: Environmental Impact Assessment, WGS: Woodland Grant Scheme.

Version 1, 2005

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<sup>1</sup> UK Biodiversity Group classification - Jackson, D.L. 2000. Guidance on the interpretation of the Biodiversity Broad Habitat Classification (terrestrial and freshwater types): Definitions and the relationship with other habitat classifications. JNCC Report No. 307.

<sup>2</sup> UK Lowland meadows Habitat Action Plan, UK Biodiversity Group - Tranche 2 Action Plans. Volume II - terrestrial and freshwater habitats. 1998.

<sup>3</sup> Jones, P.S. et al, 2003. Priority habitats of Wales: a technical guide. CCW.